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Journalism school expands investigative focus



Journalism professor Walter Robinson with students in the Northeastern newsroom. Photo by Lauren McFalls

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In the three years since students in **Northeastern University's School of Journalism** began producing investigative stories for The Boston Globe, their work has made the front page and led to indictments of Boston firefighters and reforms in the Massachusetts Probate and Family Court system.

The journalism school has an opportunity to build on this momentum -- generated largely by Professor Walter Robinson's investigative reporting seminar -- through grants from two national

foundations: a two-year, \$100,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and a one-year, \$50,000 grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation.

As a first step in expanding its investigative reporting program, the school will name Stephen Kurkjian, a three-time Pulitzer Prize-winner at The Boston Globe, its first Senior Investigative Fellow. In his new role, Kurkjian will oversee investigative and watchdog reporting projects for two Boston-area community news organizations -- the Dorchester Reporter and Cambridge Day.

Kurkjian will work on investigative pieces with editors and reporters at the community news organizations, which will also provide Northeastern journalism students with experiential learning opportunities.

The foundation grants will also enable the creation of a region-wide investigative reporting website designed to help community journalists in the six New England states undertake more in-depth reporting. The site will offer searchable public databases, provide links to public records and feature a regular blog by and for investigative reporters. The program will also sponsor regional investigative reporting workshops.

"Journalism is undergoing a period of change, and one of the exciting innovations is work in university settings like ours, both with students and now with community partners," said Stephen Burgard, professor and director of the School of Journalism. "We are grateful to these two foundations for assisting our expanded efforts. The collaboration of Steve Kurkjian and Walter Robinson marks the reunion of one of journalism's great investigative reporting teams."

Robinson, who worked with Kurkjian at The Boston Globe for many years, led the Globe's investigative unit, the Spotlight Team, which uncovered the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in 2002. He and his team members, including Kurkjian, were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2003 for their groundbreaking work.

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